

Women in Combat

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Women in Combat

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To

Major CJ Nussberger, CG 13

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## **THESIS STATEMENT**

"Women make up about 10 percent of the 230,000 U.S. troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are medics and military police, truck drivers and helicopter pilots."<sup>1</sup> The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) should not be reviewed to allow women in front-line combat positions because women are not trained to combat standards and society is not ready to face the consequences.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The National Defense Authorization Act FY-06, concerning exclusion of women from combat units was not passed by Congress this summer. In the United States Armed Forces, women are not allowed to have military occupational specialties (MOS) that are combat arms specific. As a result women are not allowed in the infantry, artillery, tanks, ground intelligence, or amtraks. These are male specific jobs because they deal directly with combat. While females can work in these units in support billets such as logistics and administration but they are not permitted to fill combat roles. However, since the beginning of the war in Iraq, women have been serving in units that have seen combat. The war in Iraq is being

fought in a non-contiguous battle space and as a result, women are being exposed to the "frontline" in their supporting roles. Women should not be assigned to combat units in which they are exposed to hostile fire or direct physical contact with hostile forces, the military should revise the NDAA so that it clearly states that women are not to be in put into those positions.

### **National Defense Authorization Act**

The National Defense Authorization Act FY-06, which discusses the exclusion of women in ground combat, was on the revision block this past summer. Section 574 of the 2006 Defense authorization bill (H.R. 1815), as currently amended, would adopt into law a rule and definition from a 1994 Defense Department memorandum that excludes women from units that are engaged with the enemy, exposed to hostile fire and with a probability of direct physical contact with the enemy. The 1994 memorandum bars women from serving in "any unit below brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground."<sup>4</sup> Women now serve in numerous combat support roles in Iraq and as we have seen in that conflict women have come into contact with hostile fire because there is no clear cut line of battle. It

seems clear that the 1994 rule needs to be updated - not incorporated "as is" into federal law.<sup>9</sup>

Women have served in all of America's major conflicts. Women were hired in medical service in the wars of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and, during the Civil War, they were hired as foragers for supplies, cooks, and seamstresses, as well as saboteurs, scouts and couriers. During the American Revolution, some women disguised themselves as men in order to join the Continental Army and fight alongside their fellow man. In all of these instances none of the women were in combat roles. In 1984 there was a survey done by Kerce and Royale on how women in the Marine Corps felt about the combat exclusion policies. One 19 year-old stated, "I believe that women cannot handle themselves under that much stress...they would just freeze under pressure and forget how to pull the trigger...they could not be out there for a straight year...going without food, and the hygiene part...we are here to back the men up."<sup>6</sup>

Women have come a long way since those times but the majority still feels the same way about combat. In today's type of armed conflict this provision would provide little protection. With what some have called a "360 degree war" anything can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time, front

line or not. In Iraq, insurgents attack all-male infantry forces and as often as they strike targets such as military supply convoys, checkpoints and camps where U.S. servicewomen are often present.<sup>5</sup> This is why a revision to the NDAA needs to be made in order to clearly define the placement of women in a non-contiguous combat zone.

### **Training Standards**

The Marine Corps has separate training standards for men and women. Below is a chart to show one of the differences between male and female training:

<i>IST minimum requirements</i>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Pull ups/Flexed-arm hang	2	12 secs
Crunches	44	44
1.5-mile run	13:30	15:00

	<u>PFT Event</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>Min</u>
Males	Pull ups	20	3
	Crunches	100	50
	3-mile run	18:00	28:00
Females	Flexed-arm hang	70 sec	23 sec
	Crunches	100	50
	3-mile run	21:00	31:00

The first test, Initial Strength Test (IST) is taken only once in a Marine's life and that is upon entrance into the Corps. The second is the Physical Fitness Test (PFT) taken twice a year by Marines throughout their entire career.

Females already start with a buffer because physically we are not seen as strong as the men. The findings of the British study offered significant factual evidence most women performed significantly worse than men in key physical tests. Women were also found to also have a considerably reduced capacity for aggression.<sup>5</sup> Another example in recruit training is the hikes. It is the author's personal experience that the conditioning hikes are not only introducing recruits to the Marine way of life but also to start to condition their bodies for combat.<sup>8</sup> The men carry ten to fifteen pounds more on hikes than females do, because the females get injured too easily and therefore cannot be pushed as hard in training. In close combat environments physical capabilities are as important as ever. Equipment and survival gear carried by today's combat soldiers, including electronic weapons, ammunition, and water weigh 50 to 100 pounds, which inhibits most women from carrying the required weight.<sup>3</sup> Even in non-combat training, women suffer debilitating bone stress fractures and other injuries, which is very common place in recruit training.

There are two other events in recruit training that differ for males and females that are the obstacle course

and the combat endurance course. Women's relative disadvantage in upper-body strength is a real obstacle to their service in ground combat units; if integrating women comes at the cost of lowering performance standards and requiring more personnel to carry out arduous, demanding tasks, such faux equality will serve no one.<sup>4</sup> Both of these courses teach the individual recruit how to pull up their own body weight successfully negotiate the obstacles before them. The obstacle course for the females is a foot and a half lower than the male course. Why? Because the majority of females do not have the upper body strength required to pull themselves up and over the obstacles. The 2002 British Ministry of Defense study, "Women in the Armed Forces," found that only one percent of women can meet the physical standards men do, that they are less aggressive and more prone to injury than men. The combat endurance course shows the same things. Women are excluded from two of the activities on the course due to the amount of upper body strength it takes to negotiate the obstacles.

"Every marine is a rifleman," yet females receive more training than the males on the rifle range because being a rifleman is not innate for females. The rifle range is a graduation requirement for all recruits. Each recruit must



maintain a score of 190 or better to pass. The initial qualification rate for females is 50% or below and for males it is 85% or above. On average female recruits receive an extra week of shooting in order to have the majority of them qualify with the minimum score. Male recruits do not get this opportunity, nor do they need it. It has been the author's personal experience that females will get anywhere between 12-15 tries to qualify, the males get half of that. However, in order to decrease the number of women getting sent home for not qualifying on the rifle range, women get several more chances to qualify on the rifle range than their male counterparts and more attention during training.

### **SOCIETAL VIEWS**

There is a very important lesson for the top Pentagon leadership contained in both the British study of combat effectiveness, and in the growing concerns voiced by seasoned U.S. military NCOs everywhere: With our nation in a wartime fight for its survival, we can no longer afford to use the armed forces as a laboratory for social engineering.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the NDAA should not be used as a forum where a woman's political agenda in her fight to gain equality on every level

needs to take place. The NDAA states that women are not to hold combat positions, but fails to define these positions.

In all aspects of the social world men treat women differently than they treat other men in that they feel that it is their duty to protect women. This protective instinct can undermine the comradeship necessary for success on the battlefield. The presence of women in combat and on the battlefield also leads to a double standards that may have a serious impact on morale and performance. "War is a man's work. Biological convergence on the battlefield would not only be dissatisfying in terms of what women could do, but it would be an enormous psychological distraction for the male who wants to think that he's fighting for that woman somewhere behind, not up there in the same foxhole with him. It tramples the male ego. When you get right down to it, you have to protect the manliness of war."<sup>6</sup> (General William, Barrow, Marine Corps Commandant)

This can easily apply today's society and how men and women are viewed differently. Mackubin Thomas Owens, an associate Dean of Academics at the Naval War College in

Newport, R.I., believes that the presence of women in a combat environment would increase friction and have a negative impact on unit cohesion. All the social engineering in the world cannot change the real differences between men and women or the natural tendency of men to treat women differently than they do other men.<sup>5</sup> Women bring that feminine mystic with them wherever they go. They can be in a camouflage uniform with camouflage paint and an M16A2 service rifle at their side and they are still seen by society as someone who needs protection. It is in a man's nature to protect women.

## **CONCLUSION**

The National Defense Authorization Act needs to be revised and clearly state that the role of women in combat is to not come in direct or indirect fire of hostile forces. It is evident that women need not be in ground combat units or any unit in which they are in harm's way. With a non-contiguous battlefield and a war on terror that cannot clearly delineate a close, deep, and rear fight, women need to be left on the sidelines. The physical demands in battle are too much for women to handle. The weight of the gear and then the possible added weight of carrying out a fellow soldier are unrealistic for a woman.

This weight is proportionately more difficult to carry by female soldiers who are, on average, shorter and smaller than men, with 45 to 50 percent less upper body strength and 25 to 30 percent less aerobic capacity, which is essential for endurance. Even in non-combat training (i.e. - recruit training), women suffer debilitating bone stress fractures and other injury.

Women are continually put in harms way in the war today, some are not assigned to combat units but it is not just the infantry that is seeing combat. But today, those conditions apply to assignments anywhere in Iraq, a country where there is no front line and entire regions are essentially combat zones with American troops - men and women alike - the targets of almost daily insurgent strikes. Against that backdrop, the lines dividing what women can and can't do have blurred. Of the roughly 1,730 U.S. troops that have died in Iraq so far, about 40 have been women - five times the number of women, all nurses, killed in Vietnam.<sup>5</sup> The NDAA states that women are not to be in combat units but when the war in Iraq does not clearly delineate the "frontline" then we are in violation of the law.

WORD COUNT: 1979

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